Studies in American Social Conditions—3

Immigration

Edited by

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Outline

The Immigration Problem

Proposed Lines of Solution

The Social Problems Group Idea

It is agreed among social workers that enough reliable information about our social conditions has been amassed to stir all thoughtful citizens, were the facts but generally known. It is likewise agreed that enough lines of solution have been proposed to make effective war on the forces of greed, lust, and death, were those solutions but widely and earnestly attempted. It is an immediate necessity, therefore, to get the ear of all right-minded men and to direct their attention to the naked facts of our social conditions till they be stirred to intelligent and persistent action. The Social Problems Group Idea is aimed at this necessity. It embraces a definite and tested plan for the constructive study of American Social Questions from the popular point of view. It connotes the wide spreading of reliable facts, the grip of those facts upon the social conscience, and intelligent action in cleaning up bad conditions. It is in brief, this—that a group of men meet regularly from time to time to consider the salient facts of our leading social problems; that they candidly discuss those facts and the proposed solutions, and that they take individual or united action toward solving the problems acute in their community. The plan is adaptable to widely different types of mind and

to men of all schools in political, social, or religious faith. A group can be formed anywhere without formalities, through the mutual desire of a few men, the choice of a leader, and agreement as to time and place of meeting.

An account of the original Group which was formed at Madison, Wisconsin, in the fall of 1906 will be found in an article in Charities and the Commons for October 17, 1908. A reprint of that article, which tells how to prepare for and conduct the meetings and touches upon the duties of the leader can be secured from the address given below for ten cents post paid.

In view of the fact that the original group met in a Christian church, the question of the reality and extent of the contribution made by the teaching of Jesus to the solution of each problem was considered. Those who desire to study the problems from this point of view are referred to "Christianity and the Social Crisis" by Walter Rauschenbush, Macmillan, New York, 1907, $1.50; to "Jesus Christ and the Social Question" by F. G. Peabody, Macmillan, New York, $1.50 (fifty cent edition Grosset and Dunlap, New York); to "The Social Significance of the Teachings of Jesus" by J. W. Jenks, International Committee, Y. M. C. A., 1906, 75c. and the books to which they refer.

Parallel studies upon eleven problems will appear in the following order during the present winter as rapidly as the exigencies of editing and printing will permit:

1. The Liquor Problem.
2. The Negro Problem.
3. Immigration.
4. The Labor Problem.

5. Poverty.
6. Excessive and Concentrated Wealth.
7. The Divorce Problem.
8. The Problem of Clean Municipal Government.
9. The Boy Problem.
10. The Increase of Crime and the Administration of Criminal Justice.
11. The Treatment of the Criminal.

These studies can be secured at ten cents apiece or one dollar for the series of eleven including a reprint of the Charities article. One hundred copies of any study (except the Labor Problem, for which no reduction can be made), or ten sets of the entire series will be sold at nine dollars. All orders for these studies and communications in regard to the Social Problems Group Idea should be addressed to R. H. Edwards, 237 Langdon St., Madison, Wisconsin. Orders should be accompanied by cash.

Suggestions for Use

The use of this study upon Immigration is in no way confined to Social Problems Groups.

1. It may also be used for personal study. References to concise statements of fact in readable form are given for those who desire a brief but orderly survey of the problem. Those who desire more scientific matter will find it under references marked with a *.

2. Interesting questions for club, high school, and collegiate debates will be found in taking up the comparative effectiveness of proposed solutions.

3. A survey course of instruction in American Social Conditions adaptable to varied institutions can be based on the material here furnished together with like material upon other problems appearing in parallel form.

4. It is especially adaptable to use in civic organizations, social settlement clubs, betterment leagues, labor unions, Y. M. C. A. classes, granges, men's clubs in churches, business men's associations, and men's clubs in general, where the basis for a constructive study of the problem is desired. For such organizations and for Social Problems Groups the following order of subjects by meetings is suggested, on the supposition that rapidity of treatment is desired, and that as many as eight or more problems be treated in the course of a winter.

First meeting, topic 1. Second meeting, topics 2 and 3. Third meeting, topics 4 and 5. Fifth meeting, topic 6. Sixth meeting, proposed solutions 1 and 2. Seventh meeting, proposed solutions 3 and 4.

Many groups will prefer to make a more thorough consideration of the problem which is of course highly desirable. Several months might well be spent upon it.

The Immigration Problem

American Immigration has become the greatest movement of population known in history. Approximately twenty-six millions of people have landed on American shores since 1820. The insignificant groups of Anglo-Saxons who came in the early decades of the last century have been steadily followed by larger and larger companies of varied stock, until each recent year, save one, has brought a horde of more than a million. The number arriving annually doubled between 1870 and 1905 when it totalled 1,026,499. In 1906 there came 1,100,735; in 1907, 1,285,349; and in 1908 782,870. Almost six million out of the twenty-six have arrived in the last six years.

A depression in American industrial conditions appears to be the only factor capable of largely decreasing the volume. The falling off in the numbers for the fiscal year 1908, the period covering the recent financial depression, illustrates the sensitiveness of immigration in general to changes in economic conditions. This is especially emphasized by the report of the Commissioner General of Immigration for 1908 which shows for the first time the number of aliens who emigrated from the United States which was 395,073, and also the net immigration which

was only 209,867, as against 1,007,163, the estimated net immigration for 1907. A continuous increase is to be expected, however, under stable economic conditions and with the present amount of governmental regulation.

Americans, for the most part, fail to appreciate the significance of this silent invasion by a conglomerate alien multitude, despite the fact that it adds more to the population annually than the number of children born to native parents. The foreign born in America, with their children, are now estimated to be one-third of our total population, and, eliminating negroes, nearly one-half of our total white population.

More striking than the extent of recent immigration, however, is its character. The English, Irish, Scandinavians, and Germans have been rapidly displaced until the preponderance of arrivals is now Italian, Hungarian, and Russian, the latter being largely Jewish. North Europe has been supplanted by South and Southeast Europe. The Italians are illiterate up to forty-three per cent, the Hungarians to twenty-four per cent, and the Russians to twenty-five per cent. Of all comers in 1905 twenty-six per cent were illiterate and eighty per cent unskilled. These figures indicate roughly the degree of unsusceptibility to American standards and ideals.

The present regulation is chiefly directed at the exclusion of undesirable classes. Among these are included idiots and insane, epileptics, paupers, those afflicted with loathsome or contagious diseases, convicts, prostitutes, anarchists, persons likely to become a public charge, and contract laborers. Chinese laborers are also excluded. A considerable number of paupers and criminals still succeed, however, in gaining admission.

Ellis Island, at the port of New York, receives nearly four-fifths of the incoming aliens. Here the most thorough provision has been made for receiving, inspecting, and examining the great throngs which pour out of the steerage. Under the eye of trained officers pass twenty-five hundred people or more, on the average, daily, a motley procession.

Some come in quest of political or religious liberty, as the Russian Jews and the Armenians, but the vast majority come with the sole desire to improve their economic condition. With backgrounds of ancestral poverty, oppressive taxes, compulsory army service, famished soil, or pitiable wages, there is little in the European peasant's life to hold him from the alluring call of America. Furthermore the economic advantages here in abundant work, high wages, and great fertile stretches of soil are painted in fanciful colors by aggressive steamship agents. Sharp competition has greatly reduced the steerage rates, and agents are active far inland, where they work up much artificial emigration. They are at work in American immigrant centers, as well, and greatly increase the assistance of new immigration through relatives and friends already here. Approximately one-half of the new immigrants are helped by the old.

The present distribution of these new comers is far from satisfactory, for they are almost entirely located in the northeast quarter of the United States, nearly seventy per cent being settled in Massachusetts, New York, Pennsylvania, and Illinois. The South and East Europeans lack the intelligence and hardihood of the northern peoples and are rarely distributed to the west and south. "Literally four-fifths of all our foreign-born citizens now

abide in the twelve principal cities of the country which are mainly in the east." In these cities the foreign peoples congest in national colonies, each of which is largely segregated from the life of the surrounding community. There they live in unsanitary conditions, with a high death rate, and are preyed upon by remorseless economic forces. The unskilled eighty per cent of immigrants must accept what they can get in work and wages. This fact determines the question of occupations, and puts into the hardest manual labor, at the lowest wage, all except those who come prepared for particular tasks.

American labor conditions are profoundly affected by those who thus accept a wage which looks large to them but upon which no American working-man can decently subsist. Save where the immigrant joins the labor union and learns to insist on a higher wage he lowers the American standard of wages and living. In this way the immigrants have driven out their competitors from certain industries, as the Jews in the clothing trade in New York, and the Slavs in the anthracite coal mines. The padrone and sweating systems flourish among them and they help to swell the ranks of the unemployed.

Assimilation in the twentieth century is a very different matter from assimilation in the nineteenth. In many ways the new immigration is as bad as the old was good. The North Europeans were of types kindred to the native stock and presented ready possibilities for physical amalgamation and community of public interest. But it becomes a problem of the first order to assimilate South Italians, Poles, Croatians, Huns, Lithuanians, Servians, Slovenians, and the like, who herd together densely, who work at starvation wages, who have no interest in Ameri-

can institutions, and who are highly illiterate, even in their native tongues.

Democracy depends upon a high level of intelligent citizenship, but the mass of recent immigrants lower that level by the ease with which they succomb to political corruption and industrial despotism. The political boss and his lieutenants represent American government to great masses of immigrant people, and the distorted view which they get has become a grave peril to our institutions.

Beneath our governmental democracy there seems to exist an increasing stratification of society into rich and poor, educated and ignorant, powerful and weak. The immigrants increase the number of the poor, the ignorant, and the weak. Many signs indicate that we have already reached a state of glut and that further accessions at the present rate can not be taken into a constituent part in American life. Stratification may become, indeed, an American substitute for the relationship of dominant and dependent races, so frequent in Europe, and colonization a substitute for the division of territory between victorious and conquered peoples.

Among proposals looking toward the solution of the problem extremists argue on the one hand for complete exclusion, and on the other for wide open doors. General agreement, however, appears to exist upon the need for closer restriction. To reduce the number of the dependent and delinquent, to safeguard the integrity of American character, to deprive the unscrupulous politician of a source of great power, and to improve the character of those who come, requires a highly comprehensive and intelligent handling of the situation. To this end the National Immigration Commission is under ap-

pointment by the President, with the approval of Congress.

The control of emigration and inspection at European ports of departure has been urged but meets objection on the ground of the multiplication of officials, and the duplication of labor without increased efficiency. The abler detection of fraudulent practices on the part of steamship agencies, and increased responsibility for the acts of their agents by the companies are imperatively necessary. The application of a searching test to eliminate those of poor physique has more than once been urged by the Commissioner General of Immigration. The rigid application of this test would eliminate a large number who are unable to do the requisite amount of work or to withstand disease. The illiteracy test seems likely to be adopted in some form in the future, for it would work little hardship to northern peoples and "would exclude one-half of the South Italians, one-third to two-fifths of the several Slav races, and one-seventh of the Russian Jews, altogether one-fifth or one-fourth of the total immigration." Such a result, however, could be only temporary. The stimulation of elementary education in southern Europe would inevitably result, as well as the selection of a higher quality of immigration in numbers not permanently reduced.

The National Immigration Conference of 1905 passed a resolution "That the penalty of $100.00 now imposed on the steamship companies for bringing diseased persons to the United States be also imposed for bringing in any person excluded by law." It has been well argued that if in addition to this action the fine should be raised to $500.00 the root of the evil would then be cut. The steamship

companies would be forced by self interest to aid rather than hinder the work of the bureau, and the hardships of deportation be practically stopped.

Plans proposed for the distribution of immigrants, although successful in some instances, meet with serious difficulties when widely pushed. The immigrant is drawn to the city as against the country by the cash wage, the greater regularity of employment, the larger fellowship with those of his own nationality, and frequently by his unfitness for agricultural pursuits. Artificial distribution, in order to be effective would have to overcome this natural gravitation. Furthermore a stream of new immigrants would take the place of those distributed, and the whole volume be increased by the economic opportunities thus opened. Before distribution will equalize itself the country must be made to exert a power no less attractive than the city, through the spread of information concerning opportunities in agriculture, through instruction in methods of farming, through fellowship in place of isolation, and the same increased economic opportunity necessary to turn the tide of native-born from city to country.

Beyond the immediate question of restriction and distribution looms the larger question of Americanization. Intelligent citizens must be made out of the vast multitude who will continue to come under any system of regulation. The agencies of Americanization are many and varied. Among them are the physical contacts of the streets, the public schools, newspapers, labor unions, political parties, and religious and educational institutions. All of these depend for their largest effectiveness upon the use of a common language. The newspaper, the labor union, and the varied range of immediate contacts influ-

ence the new comer directly, but the public school sows the seed of a truer Americanism in the mind of the child, which often bears fruit in the life of the parent as well. The Educational Alliance, a Hebrew institution in New York City, prepares immigrant children for the public schools and points the way, among others, to intelligent methods in the making of future citizens.

Americanization cannot carry the immigrant stream higher than the levels of American life. And it is not always a levelling-up process. The immigrant often comes with many qualities which might be a contribution to the America of tomorrow were they not ruthlessly stamped out or filched away. Any ideal Americanization, to be effective, must embrace the improvement of all the conditions into which the immigrant is thrown. It can be secured only by the united power of those forces which fight industrial exploitation and political corruption, and which work for social betterment, industrial justice, civic reform, and religious uplift.

Grateful acknowledgment is here made to Professor John R. Commons of the University of Wisconsin, author of *Races and Immigrants in America,* who has revised and approved the following bibliography; to Miss Mary K. Ray, class of 1908 of the Wisconsin Library School, who prepared it in fulfillment of the requirements of graduation; to the Wisconsin Library Commission for the loan of the type employed in its own publication of this bibliography (American Social Questions No. 2), and to Miss Mary Emogene Hazeltine, Preceptor of the Wisconsin Library School, for her valued assistance in the preparation of this study.

The Immigration Problem

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